(b) whether this did not amount to a subsidy of up to Rs. 5000 crores to the local steel industry; and

(c) the rationale for the irrational action?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) In the international market there is no single reference price for steel items. The export prices of major steel producing countries are reported in various trade journals including London Metal Bulletin. In December, 98 the minimum import prices for certain steel items were fixed on the basis of the avarage export prices of these items from the European Union and Japan as reported in London Metal Bulletin. Prices from the European Union and Japan were taken as reference prices since these were considered non-dumping normal export prices. The minimum import prices were fixed as a short term measure to protect the domestic steel industry against abnormally low prices prevailing in certain CIS and South-east Asian countries. In view of the improvement in the international situation and the need to strike a balance between the requirements of the producers as well as users of steel in the country, these prices have been revised downwards on 1.11.1999. Protecting domestic industry against such imports cannot be said to amount to a subsidy to the local steel industry.

Undue benefits to Exporters

552. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Joint Director General of Foreign Trade made payment to the tune of Rs. 2.04 crore towards deemed export benefits and cash compensatory support to the exporters in 1996 on the basis of claims submitted by them which were time-barred under the EXIM Policy;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof including the names of the exporters who were benefited;

(c) whether the amount has since been recovered from them and if so, the details thereof; and

(d) what action Government have taken against the officials concerned for extending undue benefits to exporters?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) It is a fact that the office of Jt. DGFT, CLA, New Delhi made payment to the tune of Rs. 2.04 crores towards deemed export benefits to 12 firms on the basis of claims submitted by these firms. The names of the firms are as follows:—

1. M/s. Micropro India Ltd., New Delhi
2. M/s. Advance Steel Tubes Ltd., Sahibabad
3. M/s. Maharashtra Seamless Ltd., New Delhi
4. M/s. SAE India Ltd., New Delhi
5. M/s. Indian Aluminium Cables Ltd., New Delhi
6. M/s. Samtel Colour Ltd., New Delhi
7. M/s. Inalsa Ltd., New Delhi
8. M/s. Indure Ltd., New Delhi
9. M/s. Wiegand India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
10. M/s. Global Engineering, New Delhi
11. M/s. Siemens Ltd., New Delhi
12. M/s. BHEL, New Delhi

During local audit, the audit team has indicated that the above claims were time-barred. However, the above finding has been contested by the office of Jt. DGFT, CLA and necessary replies have been given case-wise to the Audit Department. In the case of M/s. Wiegand India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, the audit objection has been accepted and efforts are on to recover the amount from the firm i.e. Rs. 8,08,835/-

(d) In view of the above, the question does not arise.

Amendment in Patent Law

†553. PROF. RAM GOPAL YADAV: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken a decision to make amendment in the Patent Law;

(b) whether the Convener of National Working Group of Patent Law has given any suggestion to Government in regard to the amendments to be made in the Patent Law; and

† Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.